

To the Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am the Director and owner of Honey Bear Learning Center, Inc. in Stratford. We are nationally accredited and have been a CT School Readiness Program since the SR programs inception in 1997. I am pleading our case to our Legislators, (I do realize that we are competing against many other hard hit state agencies also with budget cuts to equally important programs) to continue to support Office of Early Childhood Programs, especially School Readiness and Care4Kids programs. Below are some implications of the proposed cuts to my program. Current SRP rates aren't enough to pay our educators and with cuts, we'll have even less for our children and staff, the loss of SRP slots/reduced SRP rate and how C4K changes will impact your children, families, staff, and program.

1. The **Governor's proposal for a 5.75%, \$570 million budget** cut across the board for all state agencies will have detrimental effects on young children in our state. For fiscal year beginning 7/1/16, OEC's budget would be cut by \$12.6 million of which \$3.5 million are unspecified cuts (SRP, Care4Kids (C4K)). And we are anticipating FY 7/1/17 continuing the budget cuts even further.
2. The **Governor's proposal to "lump" all line items of one State agency (OEC)** together into one total budget for that agency (OEC) will task that agency commissioner (Myra Jones-Taylor) with making the cuts. This "block granting", takes away Legislators ability to have control over various program funding and reduces spending transparency.
3. With CT adhering to the new federal laws (asking more from the states regarding "child care subsidies"), the C4K program will be in jeopardy. The Feds want more stable child care (ie: keeping children in school regardless of a parent losing their job). This will be a **huge budget hit for C4K and is effective now, this February 2016.** OEC has revised the C4K system whereby:
 - certificates will issued for 12 months
 - C4K "policing" will be less
 - During the term of the 12 month certificate, if income increases or loss of employment occurs and parent fails to notify C4K, the family will not be penalized and the certificate will remain in effect (there will not be a "look back" period).
 - At the end of the 12 month certificate, if the parent is still not employed, then the cert will be extended for another 3 months to assist the parent with job searching.
 - Families over income at the 12 month redetermination will be issued another 12 month cert phasing them out of the program (not sure if their family share may increase).
 - For your current families who had a cert in the last year through 1/31/16 and their cert was discontinued due to being over income, notify your C4K liaison. This family most likely will be eligible for a retroactive cert.

With these major policy changes, families that have a current cert have a great advantage. Herein lies the problem with this new system - families will be have certs longer, unemployed parents will have a cert for 15 months, and over income families will have a valid cert for 24 months. These situations will drain the C4K budget. C4K WILL RUN OUT of money and open enrollment will STOP, possibly as early as this May/June.

4. **SRP funding** per slot will should not decrease nor should we lessen slots from various communities.

We were told when we signed onto the SRP (Honey Bear has been since 1997) that we should encourage families to apply for C4K. That the C4K funding would help to supplement the lower-than-market SR rate. That C4K would help us be funded properly to maintain our “QUALITY” programming. We all know it costs much more, (but I’ll use \$230/week for this example as that’s what most of our published rates currently are), but let’s say local “quality” programming costs \$990/month. When a SRP 4 year old who has a C4K cert goes to kindergarten this August, the new student filling that slot, WILL NOT be eligible to apply to C4K until enrollment is reopened. Here’s some number crunching to show how this one (1) child not having a C4K cert may impact your families and program:

			NEW C4K POLICIES EFFECTIVE 2/1/16	
	Current SRP family #1: parent unemployed no C4K	Current SRP family #2: parent employed has FT C4K cert	Same family #1	New family #2: Child goes to Kindergarten & SRP slot filled with family that doesn’t have a C4K cert
Monthly rate (\$230/wk)	\$990	\$990	\$990	\$990
SRP monthly	(743)	(743)	(743)	(743)
Family monthly share	(34)	(34)	(34)	(34)
C4K monthly	0	(736)	0	0-enrollment closed
Total	\$213 under pay	\$(523) over pay	\$213 under pay	\$213 under pay
Grand total both families		\$(310) over pay		\$426 underpay
				\$310 plus \$426 is a \$736 monthly reduction. Multiply that times the # of children in this same scenario!!

SRP funding and family fees alone are not sustainable funding sources for SR programs. The \$310 over pay example above helps us get a little closer to providing “quality”. With a potential \$736/child monthly reduction, I will be forced to reduce staffing hours, possibly layoff a staff, reduce program spending and offer fewer program services to our children and families. This will diminish our program quality for our children, families, staff, and community. Needing to make smart and economical business decisions for our programs, if OEC moves forward with the proposed C4K budget cuts, they would in effect be forcing

our hand where we may have to bypass giving a SRP slot to a lower pay family. That would be extremely detrimental to that family and our community.

All children deserve a pre-kindergarten experience. Yet, working families are in the most the need and they will be the ones not served. With closed C4K enrollment and a loss of SRP slots, employed families won't secure a cert and a SR opening, they won't be able to afford the \$990 a month, may have to stop working, may require state insurance, may need cash assistance, may need housing assistance, etc. It's a snow ball rolling faster and faster down the hill.

Again, not being funded with what it costs to operate a "quality" program with our current staff wages are already too low. OEC placed educational mandates on our educators (a great requirement for our field), yet, the funding has not increased to pay those degreed teachers what they should be compensated (comparable to our BOE SRP educators). So, here we are again, the carrot continues to be dangled in front of our educators, they are so close to biting the carrot, some may have had a taste and NOW, with this budget proposal, the state is saying, spit out the carrot. It is an appalling labor relation strategy that our degreed staff can't afford to live on SRP funded wages.

C4K is a needed service! Because OEC/CT has conformed to the new federal C4K's laws, OEC/C4K will run a short fall. These C4K cuts will dramatically impact children, families, educators and programs.

This is a CALL TO ACTION! The Office of Early Childhood Programs need your support! I do wish my best for you, our Legislators, during these trying times. May your thoughts and decisions make a positive impact our youngest citizens of Connecticut. If I may be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to call on me.

Sincerely yours, Cathie Vanicky

Catherine A. Vanicky, Director and Owner
Honey Bear Learning Center, Inc.

Member of the: CT Early Childhood Alliance
Bridgeport Alliance for Young Children Work Group 3: Early Care & Education SR Council
Bridgeport SR providers
Stratford School Readiness Executive Committee
Stratford School Readiness Council